

The Marine Mammal Center Examines Blue Whale in Marin Headlands

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 22, 2002

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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The Marine Mammal Center was able to reach a deceased blue whale on Sunday evening and conclusively determine that it was a female, 77-feet long, and most likely had been struck by a boat while alive as it had four massive propeller wounds on the upper right side of its body that sliced through skin and blubber and fractured bone.

Because the whale is decomposing, The Center's scientists were unable perform a full necropsy that would have involved an examination of internal organs and fluids. They were able to take skin samples that will be forwarded to NOAA Fisheries Southwest Fisheries Science Center for future study. "It's critical to reach a whale early on after death to gather forensic information," said Frances Gulland, Director of Veterinary Services for The Marine Mammal Center. "The public

should report immediately to a NOAA Fisheries office in their area if they think a whale has been hit."

As a private, non-profit organization, The Center holds a letter of authorization from NOAA Fisheries and a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service authorizing The Center to rescue and rehabilitate marine mammals, as well as to examine dead marine mammals. NOAA Fisheries encourages the public to report any sick or injured marine mammals to their local stranding organization or to NOAA Fisheries. Live marine mammal strandings in northern and central California should be reported directly to The Marine Mammal Center at 415.289.SEAL.

The whale was identified to be a blue whale species. Blue whales are baleen: the term "baleen whale" is another name for the scientific suborder Mysticeti. The word Mysticeti is derived from the Greek word for moustache, mystax. It may refer to the hairy appearance of the baleen plates, which baleen whales have instead of teeth. Baleen whales have two external blowholes and are larger in size than most toothed whales. Baleen whales are sometimes referred to as the "great whales." Blue whales are the world's largest living animals.

On June 02, 1970, the blue whale was designated as Endangered in its entire range as a result of historic over-harvesting. The blue whale is protected under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The world population of blue whales is 7,000-10,000 with 2,000 found in California. The California population has been noted to be growing and is the highest population in the world. Hypotheses include that more blue whales may be using California waters for its feeding grounds. Historical records show that blue whales did not frequent California waters. In California, they range between the Farallones, Cordell Bank, Monterey Bay, and the Channel Islands where they feed on krill during the summer and fall and then migrate south to Mexico and as far as Costa Rica in winter and spring to breed. Adult blue whales weigh about one ton per foot and can reach over 90 feet.

The Marine Mammal Center, a non-profit hospital dedicated to the care of wild marine mammals, rescues and rehabilitates marine mammals that strand ill, injured or orphaned along 600 miles of northern and central California coastline. Since 1975, over 9,000 marine mammals have received a second chance at life and thousands have been successfully released back to their wild ocean home. The Center uniquely combines its rehabilitation program with scientific discovery and education programs to advance our understanding of marine mammal health, ocean health and promote conservation. The year 2002 marks The Center's 27th year of conserving marine mammals and their habitat.

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For More Information:

<http://www.marinemammalcenter.org/learning/education/whales/blue.asp>

<http://ecos.fws.gov/servlet/SpeciesProfile?spcode=A02M>

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